

## **THE CLAIMS**

What is claimed is:

- 5                   1.       A reduced-fat flavored coating comprising:  
                  a flavoring agent in an amount sufficient to provide a selected flavor;  
                  a sugar matrix of sugar crystals and sugar glass in an amount effective to  
provide the coating with sufficient structural integrity to prevent flowability at temperatures  
less than about 40°C; and  
10               a plurality of microspheres comprising a dry hydrocolloid component that are  
dispersed through the flavoring agent and sugar matrix to provide a slippery mouthfeel that  
mimics fat and begins to disperse when in contact with saliva so as to mimic the melting of  
cocoa butter during consumption of chocolate,  
                  wherein the flavored coating is at least substantially anhydrous and has less  
15               than about 10 weight percent fat, and wherein the fat present exists as dispersed micro-  
droplets within the coating.
2.       The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component  
comprises at least one of an isolated proteinaceous material, a galactomannan, or a granular  
20               starch, or any combination thereof.
3.       The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component  
comprises egg albumin, whey protein isolate, soy protein isolate, casein, sodium caseinate,  
guar gum, locust bean gum, fenugreek gum, tara gum, gum acacia, corn starch, potato starch,  
25               wheat starch, tapioca starch, or a combination thereof.
4.       The flavored coating of claim 3, wherein the hydrocolloid component  
comprises guar gum, egg albumin, and at least one starch.
- 30               5.       The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component  
comprises one or more non-crosslinkable hydrocolloids.
6.       The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component  
will become dissolved at about 36°C to 38°C in saliva.

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7. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the microspheres swell in contact with a consumer's mouth and release a portion of the hydrocolloid component to permit disintegration thereof.

5 8. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating is glossy and the dispersed hydrocolloid component washes away from the mouth in about 80 to 120 percent of the time that it takes for chocolate to wash away from the mouth.

10 9. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the sugar matrix comprises sucrose, glucose, fructose, sorbitol, mannitol, maltitol, xylitol, erythritol, lactitol, polydextrose, maltodextrin, or a combination thereof.

10. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the sugar matrix comprises corn syrup and powdered sucrose.

15 11. The flavored coating of claim 1, further comprising a milk component having less than about 3 weight percent water content.

20 12. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the flavoring agent comprises cocoa.

13. The flavored coating of claim 12, wherein a portion of the cocoa is alkalized cocoa.

25 14. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the water activity is about 0.45 to 0.55.

15. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating is anhydrous.

30 16. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating has a shelf-life of at least about 3 years without refrigeration.

17. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating will not leave a visibly detectable amount of coating on a human hand in an ambient environment.

18. The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating is substantially free of a grit-increasing agent.

19. A method of enrobing a confectionery product which comprises  
5 disposing the reduced-fat flavored coating of claim 1 over a portion of a confectionery product and drying the flavored coating to at least a substantially anhydrous state.

20. A method of making a reduced-fat flavored coating which comprises:  
combining a sufficient amount of flavoring agent to provide a selected flavor,  
10 a sugar matrix formed from a plurality of sugar crystals and sugar glass, and a plurality of microspheres comprising a dry hydrocolloid component to provide a slippery mouthfeel that mimics fat and begins to disperse when in contact with saliva so as to mimic the melting of cocoa butter when being consumed;  
combining the flavoring agent, sugar matrix, and microspheres with milk to  
15 form a flowable reduced-fat flavored coating; and  
drying to at least a substantially anhydrous form to provide the coating with a non-flowable texture,  
wherein the reduced-fat flavored coating has less than about 10 weight percent fat which exists as dispersed micro-droplets.

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